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SUBJECT: MEPI UPDATE FOR MOROCCO

REF: A) Rabat 0399, B) Rabat 2509

¶1. Summary: This cable highlights MEPI programs and initiatives in Morocco from January 1 to March 31. Activities included visits by MEPI Washington and MEPI Tunis, a regional conference on the family code, political and judicial reform, women's rights, literacy training, English ACCESS Micro scholarships, international visitors programs, and promoting free trade and economic growth. Implementers are partnering with local NGOs at the grassroots level to support numerous programs committed to reform in the four MEPI pillars. End summary.

MEPI VISITORS

¶2. Owen Kirby from NEA/PI visited Morocco in January with Oliver Wilcox and Carol Saheli of USAID. They met with the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) to review their CEPPS grant on political party development. Later, IRI briefed the Ambassador and Mission staff on its political party polling results, which had been supported by this grant. The visit resulted in recommending that IRI and NDI coordinate their work and align it to political party reform.

¶3. On February 16-17, David Mulenex and Jackie Johnstone from MEPI/PI traveled to Rabat to evaluate Morocco's need for media training and reform. They were joined by Hania Oweis, the Beirut-based representative for International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) that will design a MEPI-funded media reform program for the MENA region. The PAO and Information Officer accompanied the visitors to meetings with leading directors of independent print media, representatives of local broadcast media, members of the Moroccan national press union, representatives of the High Broadcast Media Authority, as well as with the NGO chosen by IREX as its subcontractor in Morocco. Mulenex and Johnstone will use the information they gathered during their visit to guide IREX as it develops its strategy for supporting media reform in Morocco.

¶4. MEPI's Tunis Regional Officer Deputy Director Kirk Wolcott and Information Specialist Faouzi Chaouch visited Rabat March 13-17. The main purpose of their trip was to conduct a seminar on a request for applications to members of the independent media sector. Many of the 26 attendees stayed well after the conclusion of the seminar, or returned later in the week to ask questions about submitting an application. While the program was popular with the invitees, it generated much controversy since the Moroccan

press code forbids media from accepting funding from foreign sources. The national Moroccan press union denounced the MEPI project as a USG ploy to control the editorial line of Morocco's independent press.

¶5. The Tunis visitors also met individually with MEPI implementers the Financial Service Volunteers Corps (FSVC), the International Executive Service Corps (IESC), MTDS-Tanmia, the American Bar Association (ABA), attended a breakfast hosted by USAID for congressional staffer Michael Phelan and approximately 12 MEPI implementers, and met with Adala, a new Moroccan NGO specializing in judicial reform (see ref A). They also met with the DCM and emboffs to discuss ways of improving coordination efforts in MEPI programs.

REFORM

¶6. The ABA continues to develop its judicial and legal training programs throughout the country. Working with the Ministry of Justice and local legal organizations, the ABA has had a strong impact on the judicial and legal system. As the programs continue, the ABA will expand this impact and reach others including legal administrators and court officials. In addition the ABA is working with Adala to encourage the development of transparency in the judiciary. In March, the president of Adala briefed Mission staff on judicial reform in Morocco.

¶7. On March 29, USAID Democracy and Governance pillar members hosted a coordination meeting and roundtable discussion with MEPI and USAID implementers to discuss activities, successes and challenges in the area of democratic reforms. ABA, IRI, NDI, SUNY and RTI, were present at the meeting. The discussion was wide-ranging, including parliamentary reform, local governance programs, judicial training and transparency, and freedom of information within the Moroccan context. Recognizing the many successes of the programs, the group also raised issues relating to the need for constitutional reform and continuous training of the legislative and judicial branches of the GOM.

WORLD LEARNING/LEADERSHIP FEMININ
REGIONAL CONFERENCE

¶8. In February, MEPI implementer World Learning (WL) and local association Leadership Feminin sponsored a regional conference on challenges to the family code (Moudawana) entitled "The Family Code in the Plural: Realities and Challenges." The conference drew participants from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia representing local and international development institutions, human rights and women's issues NGO's, press, research centers and the public sector. The two-day conference was attended by a broad range of women's activists, Berber NGOs, parliamentarians, lawyers, and judges. Separate breakout sessions included a series of workshops focused primarily on implementation challenges for the family code. The conference was a forum for Moroccans, Algerians and Tunisians to share and exchange their experiences on the family code. The DCM gave a speech at the opening ceremony highlighting Moroccan reforms and U.S. efforts to support these reforms. WL's \$770,000 SPA grant bolstering family code familiarization ended on March 31.

EXTENDING GLOBAL RIGHTS

¶9. POL/USAID visited a local Global Rights (GR) project in the southern Moroccan village of Zagora in December to assess its impact and effectiveness. The Development Association for the Draa Valley (ADEDRA) is the regional coordinator in the Zagora area for the implementation of the GR program on human and legal rights education for women.

Emboffs visited a session for illiterate women learning about their rights and the new family code and a training session for literacy facilitators who work to incorporate women's rights training into their literacy sessions. Both sessions demonstrated the strength of the GR methodology of building capacity amongst local NGOs who are best placed and can most appropriately carry out the training programs. The Embassy has advocated for continued funding of GR projects in Morocco.

ENGLISH ACCESS MICRO SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

¶10. Post's Cultural Affairs Officer presented certificates of participation to 25 English ACCESS Micro scholarship students at the Foundation AGEF de l'Oriental in Oujda on December 29. Afterwards, the students gave short presentations in English and thanked the American people for their scholarships. On January 15, the Regional English Language Officer visited AMIDEAST in Rabat to present three short films to nearly 100 ACCESS students, followed by a lunch at McDonalds. On February 4, American violinist Jack Glatzer performed before 150 ACCESS students. After the concert, the visiting Cultural Specialist was showered with questions from curious students, who benefited from the opportunity to engage a real American in conversation.

¶11. The English ACCESS Micro scholarship program provides support to youth from disadvantaged parts of the world to study English and learn about American culture and values. It began in Morocco in 2003 and is now found in more than 40 countries. A total of 573 scholarships have been awarded in Morocco for FY 2005-06 to study at the 10 American Language Centers, AMIDEAST Casablanca and Rabat, and the AGEF de l'Oriental in Oujda.

SHARING THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

¶12. On March 3, Dar America hosted a forum discussion with Moroccan participants in the MEPI-funded International Visitor Leadership Programs (IVLP) "Young Leaders: Effecting Social, Political and Economic Change" (July 5-22, 2005) and "Student Leaders and Civic Responsibility" (Sept. 9 - October 7, 2005) with 70 university students and civil society activists. Younes Naoumi, President of "Action Jeunesse," an NGO that promotes civic education in economically depressed areas; Abdassamad Oussayeh, President of "Association de Jeunes Contre Le Sida," an organization that promotes AIDS awareness; Sanaa Bouzit, Secretary General of "Tamaynut," an association that calls for the preservation of Berber language and culture; and Lamia Chahbi, President of the Rabat English Club, briefed the audience on their participation in the IVLP program. The presenters gave an overview of their IVLP programs and detailed their impressions of the U.S. They experienced surprise at the racial, ethnic and religious diversity of the U.S. and were impressed by the importance of volunteerism in American society. Each participant praised for the "smooth way that American democracy works" and several predicted Morocco will only have economic and social stability when "it fully embraces democracy." When asked how he would apply what he learned in America to Morocco, Addassamad responded, "We need to continue sharing what we have learned with others and push the government to empower civil society." During interviews with RTM Television and Moroccan Radio following their presentations, the presenters praised the U.S. for its commitment to civil society and thanked the Mission for the opportunity to take part in the IVLP program.

FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

¶13. Mission Morocco's MEPI Economic Growth Pillar committee

thoroughly considered proper use of \$1 million MEPI free trade agreement (FTA) technical assistance provided to the Commercial Law Development Program (CLDP). In close consultation with Moroccan FTA negotiators and coordinated through multiple internal meetings, the interagency MEPI Economic Growth Committee set out mission priorities for technical assistance that will maximize the benefits of CLDP's work. In March, CLDP Deputy Senior Counsel Marc Tejtel met with the Committee. He agreed to design a work plan consistent with the GOM's and the Committee's emphasis on transparency, assistance for customs, and textiles-related obligations. The transparency provisions will contribute to good governance goals in addition to proper, timely FTA implementation. MEPI Washington and the MEPI Economic Growth Committee will review CLDP's draft work plan before implementation begins.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

¶14. Between January and March, FSVC implemented three projects in Morocco, all of which related to FSVC's core areas of activity - strengthening the banking sector and facilitating greater access to finance for small and medium sized enterprises (SME's). In February, three SME bankers, the head of the SME Federation and the head of the textile business association spent one week in the United States on an FSVC-arranged visit during which they met U.S. SME bankers and small business associations. FSVC is now working with the SME Federation and the bankers to find ways to transmit the knowledge and insights gained on the study visit to a wider audience in Morocco. FSVC's other recent programs entailed work with Bank al-Maghrib (the Central Bank) managing of "operational risk" in the banking system. FSVC also worked with two of the largest banks to upgrade internal credit rating systems (BMCE bank), and check processing (Attijariwafa Bank). Improving access to financing, especially for SMEs, is a key challenge to accelerate economic growth and create jobs to keep Morocco on a smooth path of economic growth, political reform and social stability.